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Much of the 21st century has been overwhelmed by various technological advancements that have ultimately captured the interest of society. The creation of the internet and subsequently social networking sites have added a new aspect to the theory of individual and group identity formation. Social media has played an increasing role in highlighting variations in the treatment of White and Black Americans by the police in addition to potentially perpetuating the "White Privilege" ideology. To achieve this objective, a content analysis was used to provide a contextualized interpretation of narratives from two Twitter hashtag campaigns: #CrimingWhileWhite (CWW) and #AliveWhileBlack (AWB). The tweets presented an appallingly sharp image of everyday inequalities Blacks and Whites face. #CrimingWhileWhite shows the experiences Whites have within the criminal system; In contrast, #AliveWhileBlack provided anecdotal evidence of differences in treatment. The dichotomy between content in the hash tags CWW and AWB highlighted the harsh reality and differences in treatment of people from law enforcement because of the color of their skin.

THE BLACK MIRROR OF SOCIAL MEDIA: EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF RACIAL INEQUALITIES DURING POLICE INTERACTIONS AS PRESENTED IN SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVES

by

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Approved by

_____
Committee Chair

To my Chair, Dr. Shelly Brown-Jeffy and Committee Members Dr. Saundra D. Westervelt & Dr. Cerise L. Glenn

Thank You.

This is for you, Mom

Dr. Regina Avery Epps

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis, written by Remy Heaven Epps, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Much of the 21st century has been overwhelmed by various technological advancements that have not only captured the interest of society but changed how society interacts. Given the rise of Internet communication, human social ties are now at the forefront of sociological conversation. Being that 73% of the US population as of 2015, has or have participated on a social media platform (SM), a social shift in how society interacts and communicates by disintermediating communication has been produced; "increasing the visibility of people's opinions, thoughts, and ideas, ultimately making public life measurable" (Healy 2017:1; Statista 2017). According to researchers at the Pew Research Center (2015), with 87% of all adult online users using Facebook, 300 million Instagram users, and over 9,000 tweets happening every second, social media consumption is now considered to be a critical and daily part of American's social lives and identities (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart and Madden 2015; Jenniina 2015).

A growing body of research exploring the social issues (i.e., race and ethnicity) relative to individual's participation in digital environments reveal that social networking platforms are far from race-neutral. According to this research racial segregations and inequalities exist in this setting, which raises the question of to what extent virtual world experiences influences and creates division in the digital realm. Building on this concept, my study explores, from a narrative perspective, the textual components of conversations

occurring in social media platforms, specifically Twitter, regarding the perpetuation of racial privileges during police interactions.

There is a plethora of online communication platforms (i.e., social media sites) available to society today, and it is vital that we acknowledge the effect's these, 'sociotechnical practices' have on its users (Sharma 2013). With the emergence of social media, the Internet becomes even more interpersonal and the means for instantaneous communication is inevitable. Twitter has become crucial part of daily life in respect to the awareness it provides to people and by serving as a forum for individuals to spread information rapidly. Additionally, Twitter has become a potential place for users to organize and mobilize protest of injustices. Social media is also a powerful tool for organizers. The idea that one can send out a tweet or a post and share it with millions of people within seconds is an easy way to recruit and disseminate information. Similar to mainstream mass media, social media also has the power to shape attitudes and beliefs of the masses.

This research expands on the existing literature regarding individuals' actions on social media by exposing the ways that users of online, specifically, social media user's conversations exacerbate the concept of privilege in society today. Specifically, my research will explore and examine: 1) how user comments with #AliveWhileBlack and/or #CrimingWhileWhite perpetuate or challenge the concept of White privilege and 2) how the narrative regarding police-citizen interactions and race is being created, recreated, & extended. By focusing on framing theory and the idea of White privilege, my research

shows how individuals express their viewpoint regarding race relations between themselves and individuals of authority (i.e., law enforcement).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media

The Internet is a very powerful tool that can be used to influence and shape human behavior. Likewise, social media's emergence as a "mass self-communication" form has a direct and indirect impact on how individuals see the world around them (Castells 2007). Society has grown accustomed to features on these social media sites (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) that enable users to share their day to day movements, photos, and emotions, as well as, provide users the ability to like, comment on, and even repost other users' statuses (comments) within seconds. For some users, the number of likes, shares and comments on a post hold great value, as it depicts popularity (Romero, Asur, Galuba, and Huberman 2010). Therefore, users create posts that garner attention, whether it is the most controversial or latest topic.

Due to the rapid-fire speed of posts, "likes," and comments on SM platforms, there is a lack of information control and 'credibility checking' by the users viewing and/or reacting to the content. As a result, certain topics and or viewpoints are popularized, shaping perceptions (Kaigo 2012). In social media, user-generated information is continuously being updated on user's accounts and often conveys the emotions of the person inputting the content. Moreover, the more time an individual user

spends on social media, the more likely their perceptions/opinions about a topic are influenced and shaped by the content of others.

Scholars have found that users turn their subjective realities into symbolic realities, as they post links, comments or information on social events they find interesting (Wohn and Bowe 2014). Social media users are increasingly exposed to news about social and political issues via status updates and links shared by their online connections (Mitchell 2015; Mitchell, Kiley, Gottfried, and Guskin 2013). Wohn and Bowe (2014) studied the ways in which social media networks affect individual's exposure to and attitude toward news and found that perspectives about an event will differ depending on the makeup of the individual's social network. They contended that the makeup of the individual's social media account is important, because it filters conversations; these filters influence the amount of discussion the individuals will or will not see including whether or not they were exposed to events that did not affect themselves or others in their social network (Wohn and Bowe 2014).

Twitter

Twitter is a self-governing interpersonal communication site that allows individuals to post user-generation information such as images, texts of up to 140 characters, videos, and links at their leisure called 'tweets.' According to Kaigo (2012) Twitter has three benefits: (1) creation of new personal networks and exposure to information, (2) a new 'vehicle' for online communication with friends, (3) simpler information transmission online. As a social media platform, Twitter has enabled users to develop a collective voice and informally bring more considerable attention to social

issues, ultimately making social media platforms a place for social activism. As such, Twitter has been an avid outlet for national conversations about race, race relations and racial inequality in America.

Demographics

Information pertaining to the user's demographics or any other personal information is not required to be disclosed in order to obtain a Twitter account. Users are given the ability to share as much or as little information about themselves on their account in the "about me" section in their profile area that is viewable by other individuals looking to learn information about the user.

Hashtags

Social networking sites (SNSs) have become an avid outlet for users to voice their opinions and reactions regarding societal issues by using visuals and texts to curate their sentiments (Yartey and Amankwah 2016). Twitter conversations are easily sorted and accessible for any user through the use of hashtags or a pound sign (#) followed by a short phrase; conversations are easily sorted and accessible for any Twitter user. These hashtags offer users the ability to freely create or comment on conversations that may not include others users they know. Since hashtags are accessible to all users, via "trending topics" which is a list of all popular hashtag conversations visible on the left-hand side of all homepages, the sites search bar, or user's own Twitter "followers" or friends, a dialogue is created. Moreover, users can use hashtags as a means to create counter dialogue.

Subcultures

Twitter is not only a hosting site for existing personal connections but a place where people with similar backgrounds, lifestyles, professions or hobbies can network and discuss topics that are interesting to them. One such subculture is Black Twitter which is “a group of reconstituted users tweeting racialized hashtags” (Sharma 2013:46). Black Twitter is a subculture of Twitter that works to challenge hidden and overt bias in the mainstream news. In some cases, the topics discussed particularly in Black Twitter, have been credited with propelling racially focused issues to the forefront of national awareness by many researchers and activists. Perhaps importantly, Black Twitter intends to unify Black individuals through self-identification and redefining/reclaiming of Blackness in their own space. For this research, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the development of racialized hashtags.

Black Twitter

While Twitter can be viewed as an empty playground of various thoughts and ideas waiting to be populated throughout its users, to some degree this platform serves as a “battlefield” for oppression (Lee 2017). Black Twitter is a phenomenon that uses a racialized hashtag to focus on the activity of African American’s. These racialized hashtags or “Black Tags” such as #BlackLivesMatter, #AliveWhileBlack, #OscarsSoWhite, #BlackExperience, and #SayHerName focus on the themes of community, conversation, cultural appropriation, Black excellence, and revealed solidarity against racial injustice.

Currently, Black topics are ranked as some of the top issues, encouraging users to notice the critical interests and aspects of cultural perspectives in the Black community. Specifically, Twitter has become one of the most favorable networks for African Americans to use as an outlet for their concerns, especially about police brutality (Pew Research Center 2016. Jamilah Lemieux, the senior digital editor for Ebony magazine created #AliveWhileBlack on December 4, 2014. Users used Twitter to create a hash tag that allowed other Blacks to share stories of racial discrimination using the hash tag #AliveWhileBlack. The hash tag campaign was used to provide evidence of the broken relationship between police officers and Black Americans.

By creating a collective dialogue based on the diversity of Black experiences, a boundless community of Twitter users makes a meaningful impact on how issues of race and identity play out far beyond the platform itself. Although an individual does not need to be Black to participate in Black Twitter, this platform offers African Americans a space to liberate their voices and express the pains and realities about their everyday lives in America. However, some online communities comprised of White individuals have looked to dilute the liberating effects of this new platform of expression for African Americans by developing viral content that fuels prejudices, and injustices while continuing to perpetuate stereotype representations. Ironically, these representations fueled the initial development of Black Twitter giving African Americans the freedom to share their thoughts. Ultimately, Black Twitter provided the power to dismantle and diffuse centuries old racial injustices and oppression.

Perceptions of Inequality Differences

The amount of perceived inequality or even the perceived existence of inequality in society can vary depending on the social status of the individual in question. The notions of privilege and dominance based upon socially constructed race ideologies can be found at the forefront of perception differences of inequality. Division in attitudes about race has created differences in real world perspectives about interactions between Blacks and Whites that are dramatically different (Marable 1995).

The Greenlining Institute (2011) surveyed both Black and White Americans concerning their perceptions about race and race relations. The data captured how incredibly skewed American's views on race and racial issues were in the United States. According to the data, the perceptions of White Americans were evenly divided with 46% saying they believe overall race relations are generally good and 45% saying they are generally bad (Greenlining Institute 2011). The data revealed that Black participants were more likely to indicate that race relations were bad. Moreover, Blacks were twice as likely as Whites to indicate that race related issues were not given as much attention in the US as Whites would indicate (Greenlining Institute 2011).

The division in perceptions amongst these two groups regarding race issues are highlighted and discussed daily in both traditional and social media. Specifically, these perception differences can often be observed when a criminal act includes race and power differences. A 2016 Pew Research Center survey tends to support these profound differences between Black and White adults on views about racial discrimination, barriers to Black progress and the prospects for change. This research indicated that Blacks

believed that they are treated unfairly across different aspects of life (including dealings with the police and applying for a loan or mortgage) more so than Whites believed Blacks were. These aspects of life include dealings with the police and applying for a loan or mortgage.

Construction of White Privilege

The color of one's skin and associated rights and privileges has been at the heart of many racial injustices and division in America, particularly among or between Black and White individuals. W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) suggested that "Whiteness ideology" permeates society by offering White-skinned individuals' privileges and access to cultural capital as well as resources that other racial groups do not have. Furthermore, the privileges White individuals are thought to have not only supported the idea of White dominance and superiority but granted these individuals immunities to challenges as well as shaped the world in which we live (McIntosh 1988; McIntosh 2015).

Throughout American history, the "White" race has been considered the dominant and superior group. This perspective has lead White individuals to conceptualize a world that favors their positions within it and provides them with White race privileges (Feinstein 2015; Gallagher 1997; Solomona, Portelli, Daniel and Campbell 2005). The idea of "Whiteness" has been used as the status-quo and the reference point for measuring difference in other racial groups (Eastman 2015). Consequently, this type of measuring has led to the belief that races such as Blacks are inferior to the White race. "Whiteness" philosophy continues to permeate in American society today leading to continued racial prejudices and racism because the meaning of "Whiteness" is considered

as the norm in society (Eastman 2015). Furthermore, this ideology not only separates people by skin color and background but also functions as a larger hierarchy about other racial and ethnic identities, thus impacting social perceptions and social realities of race (Marable 1995).

Race

Omi and Winant (1994) define race as a social construction grounded in physical appearances and cultural beliefs. Critical to understanding race from a sociological and psychological perspective is the fact that race is a fundamental element in developing one's identity, as it will drive perceptions and treatment of individuals in mainstream society. Additionally, race can be seen as a system of privileges and oppression, ultimately shaping the way in which individuals see and understand the world around them.

In American history, racial boundaries were drawn in obvious ways. For example, the United States used the "one drop rule," a 1662 Virginia law on the treatment of mixed raced individuals. This rule designated that any individual with one decedent that was Black was classified as such regardless of their skin color or other ancestral lineage. This rule became the standard system of racial classification in the U.S. Clearly, the construction of racial classifications is not as simple as the originators of the 'one drop rule', and it does not take in consideration a variety of historical and cultural factors. Unfortunately, this type of racial classification continues to be practiced and linked to the rationale for injustices, inequality, status, and exclusion because of race. From a sociology viewpoint, racial classifications are still a salient factor in interactions today, as

they aid in the perceptions of individual positions in society. These racial hierarchies, dictate who holds power, and limits whom or how an individual interacts within society. Therefore, those who do not hold such power, ultimately are subjected to these limits.

Structural Racism

The root of "White privilege" is structural racism and power, which has saturated American history by allotting privileges to the dominant class and chronic adverse outcomes to the latter (McIntosh 1988). History is filled with examples of the purposeful construction of a systemic structure that grants privileges to White individuals and withholds them from others, as a way of ensuring the dominant White class maintained its power (Hill and Lee 2015). For example, during the institutionalization of slaves, African people were declared to be less than human, inherently inferior to Europeans, and were to be treated as chattel property (Higginbotham 1996, as cited in Hill and Lee 2015:6). Furthermore, this 'privilege' can be traced to the creation of the United States Constitution of 1787, which was written by fifty-five White men, who at the time were only concerned with the protection of their property and the government's ability to "perpetuate their interests in every sphere of public and private life" (Zinn 1999, as cited in Hill and Lee 2015). During this time, White individuals were considered United States citizens, while people of color were considered "so far inferior that they had no rights which the White man was bound to respect" (*Dred Scott v. Sanford*, Howard, 60 U.S. 393 (1857), as cited in Hill and Lee 2015: 7).

Researchers describe White-privilege as a corollary aspect of racism that places White individuals at an advantage in society (McIntosh 1988). White privilege is this

invisible unearned package of assets that ideally gives these individuals special provisions and benefits just because of their skin color, whereas those who aren't White are denied these opportunities because of their skin color (McIntosh 1988). White privilege, White supremacy, and racism are one in the same meaning a political, economic and cultural system in which Whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources (Tatum 2003; McIntosh 1988). The patterns set in history are continued today, through the on-going pervasive and systematic discrimination against people of color in housing, healthcare, education, and the judicial systems.

The Criminal Justice System

As discussed previously, White individuals are granted unearned privileges that can ideally protect them from any deviant label, punishment or prejudice, which is known as White protectionism (Eastman 2015). White protectionism, an element of White privilege, is the way in which White individuals safeguard the "set of social and symbolic boundaries that give shape, meaning, and power to the social category White" (Wray 2006:6, as cited in Eastman 2015). As a result, Whites are framed as virtuous and pure as opposed to Blackness that is constructed as deviant and criminal in the United States (Alexander 2010; Feagin 2000; Russell 1999, as cited in Dirks, Heldman and Zack 2015).

White Privilege, specifically, the idea that Whites were superior and Blacks were inherently criminal was not only reinforced by historic policies (i.e. sharecropping and Jim Crow), but by the granting of White criminals far more leniency in convictions and sentencing while severely punishing their Black counterparts for committing the same crimes (Unnever 2008, as cited in Moore, Adedoyin, Robinson and Boamah 2015). Some

scholars believe that White individuals benefit from “racial anonymity”, the ability not to be a representation for their entire race (Muhammad 2011). White individuals who commit the same crimes as Black individuals receive empathy coupled with an understanding of societal factors (i.e. poverty), while Blacks are thought to represent their race as a whole without the same compassion their White counterparts received. As a result, the reputation of innocent along with the actually guilty is inevitably smeared (Muhammad 2011).

In turn, these positive attributes and the willingness to shield Whites presented the opportunity for privilege (McIntosh 1988; Rothenberg 2004). Thus, this “shielding” may have led to a reinforcement of the idea that Whites are exemplars of American individualism. Such treatment has relegated Blacks to a position of social and economic inferiority that has been embedded into America’s core values and continues to exist today. Specifically, the pervasiveness of White Privilege was embedded within the Criminal Justice System, through the creating the War on Drugs.

The “War on Drugs”

The “War on Drugs” begins the process of examining how White privilege continues to operate in society “ensuring the continued gross disparity in the distribution of wealth and fills prisons as part of the U.S. mass incarceration agenda” (Duley 2007:87). Instead of protecting the community, this initiative, “criminalized and labeled young, dark-skinned individuals and poor people of color as deviant and kept communities impoverished by keeping many of its members entrenched in the revolving doors of the prison system” (Duley 2007:87). According to Michelle Alexander (2010),

although on paper White individuals had a higher drug usage rate, Black individuals were sent to prison at a much higher rate. Furthermore, it was believed by scholars, that this "tough on crime" scheme was a result of a potential racial threat and White individual's perception of African American individual's threat to economic resources (King and Wheelock 2007).

As a result of the exacerbated increase of drug arrests stemming from the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970 and the three strikes/habitual offender policies (policies enacted as part of the war on drugs), the racial divide in the United States has grown deeper (Moore et al. 2015; Pewewardy and Severson 2003). By giving harsher sentences and targeting areas of poverty, wealthy White individuals could solidify their position in society, by allowing little advancement for people of color and amplifying the danger to the survival of the ethnic and racial minority group (Pewewardy and Severson 2003).

The disproportionate growth of Black men in the criminal justice system has been glorified by media coverage that often provides a skewed image, leading to skewed perceptions about the Black community. A disproportionate number of pictures of Blacks being stopped, in custody, being beaten, or behind bars strengthens the perception regarding which race (Blacks or Whites) commits the crimes. In contrast, Pepin (2016) revealed that Whites, as the dominant racial group, control media content and routinely excuses violent or deviant behavior of Whites. By submitting images that mirror unjust situations that non-Whites have faced, the notion of unalienable privileges, dignity and respect, due to the immunity of their White skin is highlighted.

Police Interactions and Social Media

Social media has become a prominent vehicle for raising awareness of unjust situations/interactions of non-White individuals in American Society, especially interactions between police and Blacks. In 2001, the Bureau of Justice reported that 52% of all police-citizen interactions occur because of traffic law enforcement (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2001). Traffic enforcement is a highly specialized function that gives police officers discretionary decision practices to conduct or not to conduct a traffic stop (Ramirez, McDevitt and Farrell 2001). These discretionary decision practices have led to allegations of racial profiling and discrimination of Blacks during traffic law enforcement encounters. This racial profiling led to the development of what is often referred to as "driving while Black" (DWB). More specifically, racial profiling refers to police allegations of stopping Blacks for alleged traffic infractions based on race rather than on legitimate law violations (Meeks 2000; Ramirez, McDevitt and Farrell 2001). For Black Americans, traffic-stop interactions with police have been problematic and steeped in controversy surrounding discrimination, use of excessive and deadly force, unnecessary arrest and inappropriate police actions.

For years allegations of racial profiling activities by police have gone unmonitored and unsubstantiated. Social media platforms (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) have provided the public an outlet to report and document these incidences bringing a heightened awareness to inequities of police treatment of Blacks. Consequently, mounting evidence has begun to support the perspective that police interactions differ amongst Blacks and Whites, especially at traffic stops. A national survey of police-citizen

interactions during traffic stops conducted by Patrick Langan of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2001) found that Blacks were more likely to be stopped while driving than Whites. Additionally, Black juveniles were more likely to receive multiple moving violation tickets than their White juvenile counterparts, who received just a ticket or warning for the same violation (Lundman and Kaufman 2003). However, the strongest research evidence presented demonstrating treatment difference of Blacks and Whites during traffic stop encounters is from racial profiling litigation. For example, racial profiling cases against law enforcement agencies in Maryland and New Jersey presented evidence indicating that African Americans represent 16.9% of all drivers on Interstate 95, 72% of the drivers stopped for traffic violations were Black and 81.3% of the Blacks stopped were searched (Lamberth 2000, as cited in Lundman and Kaufman 2003).

The discretionary decision power given to police for traffic enforcement may have opened the door for opportunities for abuse, and racial profiling. Furthermore, extensive media coverage (i.e., traditional and social) of the discriminatory and inappropriate actions of police towards Blacks during traffic stops has consequently affected public opinion. Survey data from a 1999 Gallup Poll tends to support this viewpoint with 59% of all Americans, including 77% of Blacks and 56% of Whites, indicating that they believe that racial profiling by the police is “widespread” (Gallup News Service 1999).

The identification of the root cause of police profiling of Blacks and other individuals of color at traffic stops still need to be addressed. Research suggests that racial profiling behavior stems from traditional cultural beliefs about individuals based on

skin color and stereotypical characteristics assigned to that skin color by society (Lundman and Kaufman 2003). Media (i.e., traditional and social) continues to play its role in supporting and sustaining this behavior through its perpetuation of negative stereotypical images and dialogue about Blacks as well as other individuals of color with White individuals portrayed as the norm. Consequently, cultural beliefs, and media (traditional and social) must be considered when exploring why police institute a more heavy-handed and less respectful approach to treating Blacks than White individuals (Websdale 2001). How these incidences are conveyed through traditional and social media avenues may be based on pervasive racist characteristics of American society and those individuals with control over the dissemination of content material. How and what information is disseminated about police interactions with Black and White citizens will critically impact opinions and beliefs about legitimacy of actions by police; what may be occurring is a form of social control.

Social Control in Social Media

Farquharson (2011) demonstrated that like traditional media, control over web content is an issue, especially when it comes to how racial groups are represented. Historically, in traditional media, the control of content including programming, advertising, and news has rested with the dominant group in American society. As a result, the experiences, values, and perceptions of Whites are considered representative of the norm in society (Pepin 2016). Consequently, individuals of color, notably Blacks, are portrayed disproportionately in a negative stereotypical and disparaging light, or even find themselves being censored. Online journalists have reported that recent events

regarding the Black Lives Matter movement, such as recorded police interactions that were posted on Facebook have been removed ultimately preventing the exposure of racial injustices to a broader audience (Karr 2016). By controlling content including images and information, it sets the stage for normalizing oppression and perpetuating the idea that continued marginalization is inevitable (Pepin 2016).

Web content is a reproduction of existing norms, rules and power relations that can be harmful to the Black identity and culture. Regardless of the media (e.g., traditional or social) the continuous bombardment of negative, stereotypical portrayals of Blacks as disadvantaged and criminals with violent behaviors has psychological and social implications. Research supporting this perspective indicates that Black individuals often become "hypersensitive" to social messages about inferiority and stigmatization (Lee, Steinberg, Piquero and Knight 2011). Farquharson contends that "although non-Whites can choose the way they are portrayed in their online spaces, in mainstream Western online spaces non-White portrayals are shaped by the White perspective, which may or may not reflect non-Whites' interests" (Farquharson 2011:478). Consequently, social media networking sites may be a place where perpetuation of White ideology continues.

New social media technology such as social networking sites (SNSs) are allowing individuals to rapidly capture and transmit unfiltered, damaging images of the world. Moreover, networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter allow individuals to inform groups of people about events and issues, influence opinions and mobilize them in support of causes (Mayfield 2008). Previously researchers have found that traditional news outlets select stories that are worth spreading to the public (Shoemaker and Reese

1996). However, social media has become the primary news source for people, as many individuals are shifting from traditional news outlets such as television. As a result of this shift in information sources people are now unintentionally exposed to news on social media even when they don't seek it out (Mitchell, Kiley, Gottfried and Guskin 2013).

Influence

Some researchers believe that people in the new information age make choices based on the opinions of their peers and friends (Domingos and Richardson 2001). Specifically, Zhu and Huberman (2014) found that in the online environment other people's opinions significantly sway people's own decisions. People were more likely to change their own opinions when facing a moderate number of opposing opinions (Zhu and Huberman 2014). Humans have an innate fear of being isolated; the more an opinion becomes that of the majority, the further the minority of opinion sinks into silence (Bowe and Wohn 2015); thus, social networking sites and media has a large role in shaping perceptions of public opinion.

On social media, user-generated information is continuously being updated on user's accounts, and primarily holds the emotions of the person relaying the information. Scholars have found that users turn their subjective realities into symbolic realities, as they post links or comment on the information or social events they find interesting (Wohn and Bowe 2014). Because these posts are shared with individual users trust such as family and friends, users are more likely to have some form of reality thought, or belief that the content is factual. Notably, all users accounts are not the same, therefore the effects on the perception of reality are going to be different. Individuals who have a

more diverse online network may have a very different sense of reality than those people with homogeneous online networks (Wohn and Bowe 2015).

On Twitter, users are increasingly exposed to news about social and political issues via status updates and links shared by their online connections (Mitchell 2015; Mitchell et al. 2013). As a result of social networks, the traditional communication lines have been blurred; therefore, researchers have created a new form of communication called mass self-communication (Castells 2007). Facebook, for example, is "a platform where influence is driven to a strong degree by friends and algorithms" (Mitchell 2015:4). Users of these sources are impacted as a result of their usage; the more time spent on these networking sites the more susceptible individuals become to perception molding. It is vital that this research explore how these technologies affect, if at all, these users' understandings and attitudes toward world-wide events.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Erving Goffman's Framing Theory

According to Goffman's Framing theory, frames (i.e., media) influence opinion and behavior by isolating and perpetuating aspects of an issue and repeated exposure to these specific aspects of the conversation. The news media, specifically broadcast news, have been vital to informing the public and shaping public opinion in America. These "gatekeepers" of the news hold incredible power in the selection of news stories and the way they are told. Researchers suggest that traditional media journalists' own personal values tend to be biased in their reporting, which contributes to news stories becoming more inflammatory and politicized (Goldberg 2001). As the public becomes more aware of different organizations' underlying political values and the media's motivation for presenting stories in specific ways, viewers have opted to seek news that is catered, or framed, to support his or her views. While framing can be intentional by the media, it is the inherent result of the how writers and producers choose to present the facts of controversial cases.

Earlier studies of framing theory focused on how news media frames issues that directly influence public perceptions (Goffman 1974). Research in the field of communication has used Goffman's framing theory to understand mediated interactions, e.g., dissemination of information through technology (Knorr 2009; Rettie 2009).

Traditional media has commonly used framing techniques to convey information about an issue or topic. For example, television news outlets may provide information about a political topic. On Twitter, the use of a hashtag (#) helps disseminate information by facilitating, or organizing specific conversations. Moreover, hashtags work to streamline and organize the meaning of messages that amplifies attention to the subject. The hashtag has been described as a highly polarizing word or phrase that is intended to stimulate conversation by encouraging users to either pick a side within it or add to discussion (Meisel 2012). Therefore, depending on the user's social media network friends, they may have skewed conversations, potentially influencing their opinion towards the subject. The frames influence opinion and behavior by isolating and perpetuating aspects of an issue and repeated exposure to these specific aspects of conversation can tell individuals what issues to think about and how to think about the issue.

From a social sciences perspective, the theoretical concept of framing offers the opportunity to explore how individuals and groups in society perceive and communicate about their reality. Goffman (1974) contends that examining the process of talk, communication dialogue (e.g., narratives) between individuals will reveal a thought process about a topic that will consist of mental representations and interpretations of reality. Therefore, the specific language in communications must be examined closely for words or phrases that may indicate meaning about individuals' perceptions of reality. Goffman (1981) contends that the framing of information can be positive or negative based upon what relevant facts are conveyed, left out, or phrased. Consequently, the reference point that an individual uses to understand the information is altered to

ultimately affect their perception. Notably, there have been many political as well as criminal events in American society where information is framed in a manner to benefit one side of the issue over the other.

Arguably, it can be said that framing is a picture of interpretations of communications (e.g., words, anecdotes, stereotypes) that individuals may use to understand as well as respond to situations, thus, aiding them in understanding their world. Perhaps more importantly, the frames that are created influence the choices about user's own actions and interactions. Applying Goffman's perspective, importance lies in examining the messages of Twitter to explore how topics are discussed and influence perceptions of reality in connection among specific hashtag topics.

Peggy McIntosh's White Privilege

McIntosh's ideology of White privilege focused on understanding how skin color privileges permeate through the daily lives of individuals. McIntosh believed that White privilege is a phenomenon that often denies and protects as a result of societies interlocking of various hierarchies (i.e., gender and economic). This type of privilege is like an invisible package of unearned assets that can be obliviously cashed in on a daily basis just because the individual is White. This invisible package of privilege is filled with unique provisions for Whites. According to McIntosh, these provisions act as free passes, tools, blank checks and passports in society, providing Whites with advantages and a means to oppress others.

From McIntosh's perspective, White-privilege ideology makes the White racial group confident, comfortable and to a certain extent oblivious to the feelings of other

racial groups (e.g., Black). Moreover, Whiteness protects from various forms of hostility, distress, and violence, unlike that of people of color (McIntosh, 1988). As a result, a list of conditions of patterns of White privilege and assumptions were developed to demonstrate her thoughts. McIntosh's thoughts are as follows:

> I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of White privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions which I think in my case *attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege* than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location—As far as I can see, my African American co-workers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions. (McIntosh 1988:2)

These patterns demonstrated that White skin color was an asset for making social systems work. Perhaps more importantly, the trends set the stage for creating a belief that individuals could "freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms" (McIntosh 1988:4).

By using McIntosh's ideology and list of conditions as an approach to explore how Twitter users convey racial interactions with police in their posts such as #AliveWhileBlack or #CrimingWhileWhite, insight can be gained regarding how narratives about race are created, recreated and interpreted. Twitter is filled with many examples that support McIntosh's invisible special provision package. Moreover, Twitter users try to define and grasp an understanding of the concept of White- privilege within their own daily lives through their post and repost with hashtags such as #WhitePrivilegeMeans. A participating user of #WhitePrivilegeMeans posted that White privilege is "the level of social advantage that comes with being seen as the norm in

America, automatically conferred irrespective of wealth, gender or other factors. It makes life smoother, but it's something you could barely notice unless it was suddenly taken away—or unless it never applied to you in the first place." In addition to the Framing Theory as a theoretical framework for this research, Peggy McIntosh's (1988) White Privilege Checklist derived from her conceptual ideology of White-privilege is being used, as a basis to thematically analyze user's comments.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

This research will explore how individuals use Twitter to create and recreate a narrative about police-citizens interactions specifically focusing on:

1. How do user comments with #AliveWhileBlack and/or #CrimingWhileWhite perpetuate or challenge the concept of White privilege?
2. How is the narrative regarding police-citizen interactions and race being created, recreated, and extended?

This study examines narratives on Twitter examining ways that content has been shaped to highlight racial injustices and inequalities. Upon analyzing Twitter content, I discuss the ways in which the narratives offer the opportunity to view the prevalence of White privilege ideology. Perhaps most importantly, the content analysis provides evidence of how White privilege influence perceptions of racial interactions, inequalities and injustices on Twitter.

Sample

My research uses two hashtags: #CrimingWhileWhite (CWW) and #AliveWhileBlack (AWB) that emerged in the wake of the decision not to indict the officer connected to the death of Eric Garner. Following the verdict, individuals became active on Twitter in organizing and providing information about protests, as well as sharing their stances on racial profiling and police brutality. Two instances of the latter

were conveyed using hashtags #AliveWhileBlack (AWB) and #CrimingWhileWhite (CWW), which were employed to organize and label communications around specific topics such as the jury decision and racial profiling.

#CrimingWhileWhite was created by Jason Ross, a writer for The Tonight Show, on December 3, 2014 with the purpose of highlighting racialized disparities in police treatment. This campaign was intended for individuals who identified as White to post about their experiences and interactions with police. Despite the initial intent of the hashtag to highlight racial disparities in police treatment, many individuals viewing these posts felt that this hashtag "aggrandized privilege while underscoring the significant issues people of color face" (Kitzie and Ghosh 2015:1).

Twitter has allowed for the voices of many to be heard and Black Twitter has offered the Black community the opportunity to focus on issues of importance and freely share their opinions in a space where their values are fundamentally accepted. Through a single conversation, members interact with each other conveying their feelings and perceptions as if they believed they were in a safe space.

In the Black Twitter community, #AliveWhileBlack (AWB) became a hashtag that attracted members with similar ideals and experiences relative to inequalities and injustices in their daily lives. Jamilah Lemieux, the senior digital editor for Ebony magazine, created #AliveWhileBlack on December 4, 2014 as a response to Jason Ross' CWW campaign. Assumed self-identified Black users were then able to share their stories of police interactions by using the AWB as a way to refocus the conversation, to the racial injustices during police interactions.

The purpose of this study was to provide an analysis of salient (most interactive) personal (unverified) narratives (posts) regarding users own or recounted interactions and/or ideas regarding policing using the specified hashtags, AWB and CWW. From December 3, 2014 to January 4, 2015, 2500 tweets were posted to the hashtags AWB and CWW. Salient entries were determined through observing replies, retweets, and shares, which indicate popularity and level of acceptance by the community through the ensuing discussions. Salient tweets were only collected, as a means to better understand what content pertaining to the specified hashtag was being interacted with the most on Twitter. From the 2500 tweets reviewed, *N*=144 tweets had 15 plus reposts or comments and were identified as salient. Of these 144 salient tweets, 82 were from hashtag AWB and 62 were from the hashtag CWW. Salient tweets were sorted by hashtag, and coded on whether or not the narrative dealt with police interactions.

Methods

RQ 1: How Do User Responses to #AliveWhileBlack and #CrimingWhileWhite Perpetuate or Challenge the Concept of White Privilege?

To answer the research question, "How Do User Responses to #AliveWhileBlack and #CrimingWhileWhite Perpetuate or Challenge the Concept of White Privilege?", each tweet's narrative was examined for content and theme development based on Peggy McIntosh's White Privilege checklist. Theme development involved matching direct (word for word), indirect (without quoting) or implied (suggested) content language to key words and phrase used in McIntosh's 50-item checklist content (see Appendix A). From McIntosh's checklist, I developed four major thematic categories that captured

individuals experience across both hashtags. These categories included: Racial Profiling/Cultural Stereotypes, Feelings of Exclusion, Societal Fears, and Privilege (see Appendix B). Furthermore, these major categories consisted of subthemes or subcategories, which were created from detailed analysis of each salient tweet related to specific privilege items in McIntosh's Checklist, as shown in further detail in Appendix B. The *Racial Profiling/Cultural Stereotypes* category included narrative themes such as victim blaming, financial reliability, housing capability, harassment, and user's feelings of being singled out. The *Feelings of Exclusion category* included subthemes of neighbor interactions, isolation/mistrust, job/racial inequities and leadership credibility. *The Societal Fears* category was geared toward feelings or mindset rather than about actions associated with having or not having privilege, such as protecting children for safety, educating children about systematic racism, power, acceptance/freedom, and mistreatment in public places. The *Privilege* category was developed based on White privilege being "an invisible package filled with special provisions for Whites that provides free passes, tools, blank checks and passports and other advantages to Whites" (McIntosh 1988:6). McIntosh's White Privilege checklist has been used to identify experiences of individual's in #AWB that did not meet characteristics associated with having the same privilege as White individuals. In the case of #CWW posts, McIntosh's checklist needed to be used differently and in a way to identify when White Privilege was in effect.

Once the tweets were coded into these four categories I was then able to examine the frequency of each category to determine what theme(s) were the most perpetuated in

relation to White Privilege. Additionally, I was able to determine any other themes that could be used for future research, by examining all tweets to see whether they fit into one or more of the categories. Therefore, from categorizing and analyzing the comments and replies on Black Twitter, and Twitter, I was able to answer this research question and discern how user responses to #AliveWhileBlack and #CrimingWhileWhite perpetuate or challenge the concept of White privilege.

RQ 2: How are the Narratives Regarding Police-Citizen Interactions and Race Being Created, Recreated, and Extended?

To answer Research Question 2, I examined all twitter posts from #CrimingWhileWhite and #AliveWhileBlack, between December 3, 2014 and January 4, 2015. I then selected the salient (most interactive), personal (unverified) original narratives (posts) about user's own or recounted interactions and/or ideas regarding policing using the specified hashtags (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Example of a Salient Tweet.

All cases selected were anonymized, and no user was able to be identified by their user names on Twitter. Salient entries were defined by posts that had the most interactivity (replies, retweets or likes), during the specified date range of December 3

2014 to January 4 2015. Consequently, I could gauge how narratives were being shared or perpetuated, commented on or liked the most.

Determining salient entries was achieved not only through observing replies, retweets, and shares, which indicated popularity and level of acceptance by the community, but through the ensuing discussions, if there were any. The ideal critical case samples were identified as those that had more than the average amount of at least 15 responses (the average amount of response) in at least one or more categories of replies, retweets, or likes, and was based on the initial data collection, indicating that 15 is the average amount of activity a post receives. As a result, the creation, recreation, and perpetuation of conversational themes within prevalent police-citizen interaction tweets could be determined. “Created” is defined as the original tweet, not including any other interactivity (likes, shares, replies). “Extended” is determined by the number of retweets or shares, as it represents the spread of user’s message to others. “Recreate” was determined by comments that reported a different perspective or possibly similar perspective on the interaction, as it depicts how the original tweet has been reproduced by others. This process allowed for a deeper analysis and a richer conclusion to be made about the symbolic inequalities present and its relationship to White privilege.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results are presented quantitatively and qualitatively from the individual analysis of #AliveWhileBlack (AWB) and #CrimingWhileWhite (CWW). The results section is divided primarily into two sections based upon each research question: 1) How do user comments with #AliveWhileBlack and/or #CrimingWhileWhite perpetuate or challenge the concept of White Privilege? and 2) How is the narrative regarding police-citizen interactions and race being created, recreated, and extended? Each section will contain hashtag AWB and CWW profiles, in-depth analysis and discussion relative to the intended research question.

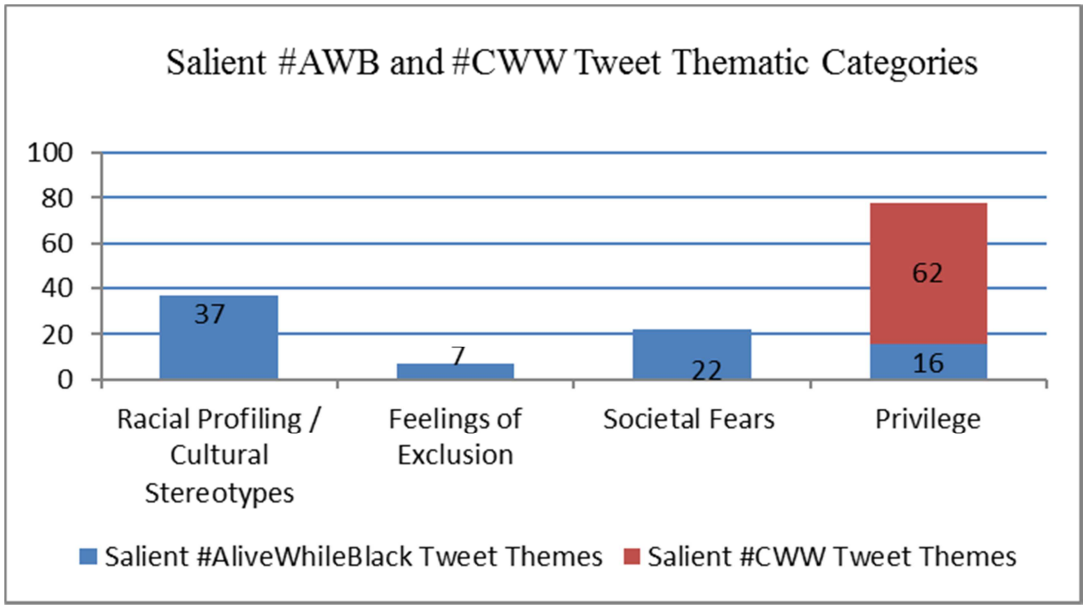
Results

RQ 1: How Do User Comments with #AliveWhileBlack and/or #CrimingWhileWhite Perpetuate or Challenge the Concept of White Privilege?

Original salient tweet's contextual language was coded under each of the four themes generated from McIntosh's White Privilege checklist. Salient entries were achieved not only through observing the amount of replies, retweets, and comments, which indicated popularity and level of acceptance by the community, but through the ensuing discussions. Original posts that had at least 15 responses (replies, retweets, likes) were then coded under each of the four themes of *Racial Profiling/Cultural Stereotypes, Feelings of Exclusion, Societal Fears*, and *Privilege*. Racial profiling encompassed any

language in the narratives that would constitute being suspected of committing a crime without evidence because of an individual's race or ethnicity. Feelings of exclusion included any narrative language that suggested the individual believed that they were not given certain rights, treatment or opportunities. The societal fears category included narratives that expressed perceived prevalence of fear or anxiety about how their interactions were impacted by the color of their skin. The privilege category captured narratives that indirectly implied that a situation or actions occurred because of advantages associated with skin color. The data for each hashtag #AliveWhileBlack and #CrimingWhileWhite are discussed in-depth to provide insight into how narratives about race may or may not perpetuate the idea of White privilege.

Table 1. Salient #AliveWhileBlack and #CrimingWhileWhite Tweet Thematic Categories



#AliveWhileBlack. In examination of the narratives in AWB, members expressed freely about their experiences in society where they believed an injustice had occurred because of the color of their skin. As indicated previously, my analysis involved coding the textual content of each narrative into four category themes. As illustrated in Table 1, the largest number of tweets fell into the Racial Profiling/ Cultural Stereotype category. More specifically, out of the 82 salient #AliveWhileBlack tweets analyzed, 81% of these posts pertained to users implied feelings of Racial Profiling/Cultural Stereotyping and Societal Fears, while roughly 10% discussed Feelings of Exclusion.

Although an individual tweet might contain indicators of more than one major theme, the text was coded based upon the strongest indicator that would explain the text as a whole, not just specific parts of the text. For example, the following text illustrates a narrative about a user's experience with an interaction with law enforcement. In this tweet, direct language fell in the category of racial profiling with word phrasing such as "think she's White" but indirect and implied language with "Cops asked for my ID and license for her protection."

> Pulled over w my mom. People think she's White, she was driving.
> Cops asked for my ID and license "for her protection" #AliveWhileBlack (10:58 AM – Dec. 4, 2014)

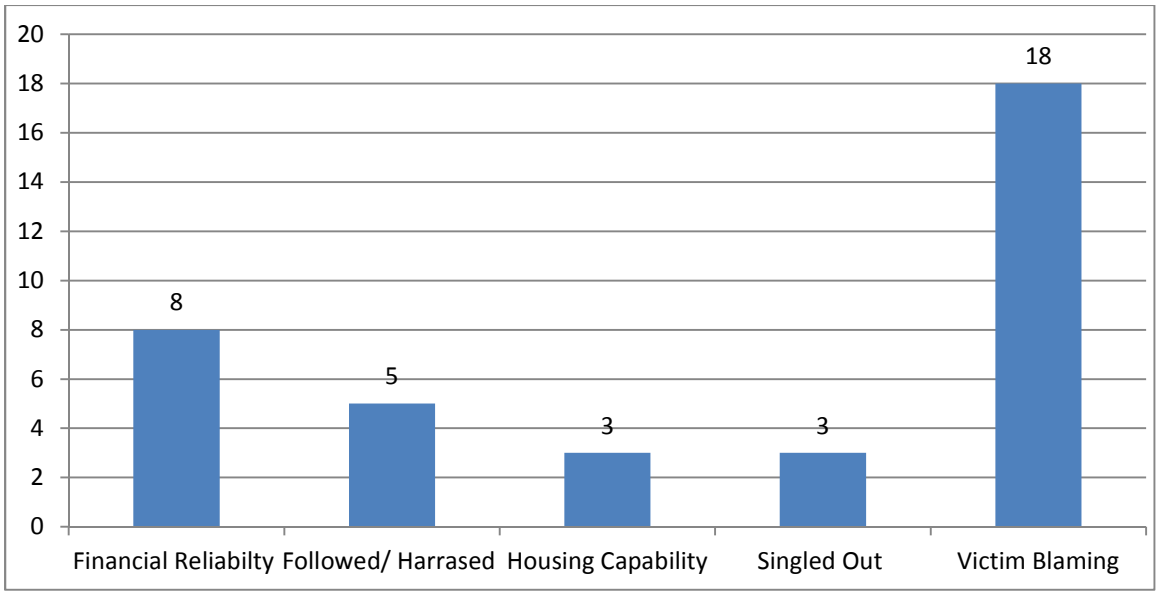
In this case, the request for the passenger's ID instead of the driver's ID suggests profiling is occurring based on skin color. This assumption can be further extended through the direct comment "for her (meaning the driver's) protection." Because skin color was directly and indirectly implied as a determinate for "the cop's" behavior, this

tweet fell into the overarching category of Racial Profiling/Cultural Stereotyping. Although we could look more in-depth at the consequences of the Cops behavior and how it possibly impacted the passenger whose ID was requested psychologically indicating feelings of isolation, the main topic of the tweet is racial profiling.

Racial profiling/Cultural stereotyping. Many of the narratives falling into the Racial Profiling/ Cultural Stereotyping category revealed that individuals felt they were type cast based on financial capabilities and the neighborhoods in which that lived. This typecasting happened during generic social interactions among fellow peers and during interactions with law enforcement that resulted in delays of legal or medical help. Factors of race, financial abilities and neighborhood residence tend to be used to classify people and situations that guide suspicion and action relative to individuals of color (Lundman and Kaufman 2003; Marable 1995). An examination of the narratives originally coded Racial Profiling/Cultural Stereotyping exposed five sub-categories. The sub-category themes identified were victim blaming, financial reliability, housing capability, being followed/harassed, and being singled out. Table 2 shows how the thirty-seven Racial Profiling/Cultural Stereotyping tweets were organized into the subcategories. These sub-theme categories provided greater insight into the experiences/feelings of #AWB users.

Victim blaming. The sub-theme category victim blaming had the largest number of individuals in #AWB recounting these types of experiences.

Table 2. AWB Racial Profiling/Cultural Stereotypes Salient Tweets: Sub-Themes



The following tweets display experiences where a crime was committed against the person posting the tweet and they needed assistance yet they were ignored or blamed for the crime, fitting into the sub category of victim blaming.

> Went to police station to report that a White man had sexually assaulted me. Was lectured about how I could ruin his life. #AliveWhileBlack (11:25 AM – Dec. 4, 2014)
>
> House broken into. Cop laughed. Wouldn't file a police report. #AliveWhileBlack (10:42 AM – Dec. 4, 2014)

The narrative language in these two above tweets is clear and direct. Item 41 of McIntosh's checklist indicates a privilege of being White is "I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me" (McIntosh 1988). Clearly, these individuals felt they did not receive the quality of treatment they needed and deserved because of the color of their skin.

Financial reliability. The subtheme of financial reliability was present in eight of the tweets about Racial Profiling/Cultural Stereotypes. Financial reliability is used to describe the verifiability or the trustworthiness of financial information. In this case, the term is used to capture tweet content that denotes the judgment of the #AWB individual based on their financial (i.e., type of job) or ownership (i.e., type of car or home) capabilities. Financial reliability, or rather capability, is used to profile the individual under the hashtag #AWB.

> Rental car broke down during a BAD rainstorm police accused me of stealing the car left me in the rain to run the plates. #AliveWhileBlack (1:09 PM – Dec. 4, 2014)
>
> My dad & I were pulled over after leaving an open house in affluent neighborhood. Questioned why we'd want to move there. #AliveWhileBlack (10:28 AM – Dec. 4, 2014)

The language in the tweets demonstrates meanings that are direct as well as implied about the financial reliability/capability of the individual. The specific language of "rental car" used in conjunction with the phrase of "accused of stealing the car" denotes a potential judgment of the individual's financial worthiness to afford a rental car. Consequently, the belief is that the individual stole the car because of the color of their skin. The question of the financial reliability/capability of the individual can be more implied than direct. In this narrative, the language "leaving an open house in affluent neighborhood" denotes potential judgment of financial reliability/capabilities to own an expensive house. Furthermore, the question of "why we'd want to move there"

may signal to the individuals in question that their presences in that neighborhood is not welcomed, thus leading to feelings of exclusion.

In American society, racial inequality and injustices in the daily lives of non-Whites can be overt, subtle and covert spanning across a variety of domains such as education, employment, housing, and credit and financial markets (Feagin 2000). The above tweets demonstrate some of the race based financial discriminatory subtleties experienced by individuals participating in #AWB. McIntosh (1988) noted that Whites are rarely questioned about their financial reliability or capabilities. Peggy McIntosh's (1988) reflection on her own financial experiences can be seen in item 13 of her White Privilege checklist: "Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability." These financial experiences, as mentioned by McIntosh, rarely happen for individuals of color who are more likely to be financially discriminated against because of the color of their skin (Feagin 2000).

Societal fears. Fears, specifically societal fears, are the second major theme category. Posts falling into this category were about feelings or mindset rather than about actions associated with having or not having privilege. These subcategories include protecting children, educating children about systematic racism, power, acceptance/freedom, and mistreatment in public places. The following text is an example of the subheading of protecting children and education of systematic racism.

> When I Have to explain to my little brother to never have his hood up, never run in public . . . #AliveWhileBlack (3:24 PM – Dec. 4, 2014)

In the wake of Trayvon Martin's death, a young Black teen, who was shot and killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer, for "looking suspicious" while wearing a dark colored hooded sweatshirt. This incident not only sparked national outrage but created the need to educate Black Individuals on "how to not appear suspicious." The wearing of a dark colored hooded sweatshirt became a symbol of racial profiling and social injustice in the African American community. Such unfortunate truths only fostered feelings of discomfort and paranoia among the Black Community.

> Having a Black son means you have to teach them how to behave if stopped by the police because you want your child to live. #AliveWhileBlack (3:21 PM – December 4, 2014)

The above narratives provide insight into the #AWB individual's mindset. The feelings of fear are indicated with the word selection of "never" and the work phrasing of "you want your child to live." Although there are several different discussions parents should have with their children in regards to life, for parents of kids of color, one of them involves the heartbreaking reality of their kids being mistreated, and even killed, by the police. This fear is based in the presumed negative actions that could happen in police-citizen interactions. This fear created a need to educate others about a system of racism, specifically through instructing children on "how to behave" during interactions in society which could adversely impact a child of color's overall well-being.

Unlike White children, Black children receive fewer basic protections leaving them vulnerable to harsher treatment typically reserved for adults (Goff, Atiba, Jackson, Allison, Di Leone, Culotta and DiTomasso 2014). Black families educate their children

about systematic racism to protect them from dehumanization caused by racial profiling. Whites, however, do not need to be educated about the ill effects of racism. In recounting her own privilege perspective, Peggy McIntosh stated,

> As my racial group was being confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit in turn upon people of color. (McIntosh 1988:3)

Feelings of exclusion. Out of the four major theme categories, feelings of exclusion had the least number of tweets. As defined earlier in this section, feelings of exclusion focus on the belief that the individual has limited access to opportunities and is singled out or isolated from the whole. These feelings of isolation can revolve around feelings of exclusion within neighborhoods, social circles, and professional settings. Many of the tweets in #AWB that used direct or implied language about feelings of exclusion tended to drive home the existence of White privilege. This type of privilege provides Whites with advantages and oppresses others. Moreover, White privilege's advantages come from not being excluded from mainstream society in the ways that people of color are (McIntosh 1988).

Narratives that expressed feeling of exclusion included subthemes of neighbor interactions, isolation and mistrust, job/racial inequalities, and leadership credibility. Four of the seven tweets categorized as feelings of exclusion pertained to individuals feeling as though their neighbors, friends, or coworkers were not pleasant to them either as a result of spying, assuming some type of suspicious behavior was happening, or making

impromptu police calls resulting in implied feelings of exclusion. The following text is an example of a narrative that demonstrates the behavior from neighbors of a #AWB participator that lead to feelings of exclusion.

> White neighbors called the police the day my husband and I moved into our new house. They watched us unload the truck. #AliveWhileBlack (11:44 AM – Dec. 4, 2014)

The language used in the text indicates the color of the neighbors as White. However, because Twitter users do not have to indicate their race, there is no clear way of identifying whether the #AWB individual recounting the incident is non-White. Yet, the White neighbor perceived the image of the #AWB individual moving into the house as conflicting with the neighbor's ideals and expectations regarding who should be able to afford to move in their neighborhood. Therefore, the act of moving into the neighborhood was unwelcoming and suspicious because of the color of the #AWB individual's skin. This designation of suspicious behavior is more about the individual doing the behavior associated with being suspicious than the person the behavior is directed towards (Diphoom 2015). Often, individuals of color are labeled as suspects as a part of racial profiling that leads to fears associated with being profiled (Feagin 2000; Lundman and Kaufman 2003).

Privilege and #AliveWhileBlack. McIntosh's White Privilege checklist has been used to identify experiences of individual's in #AWB that did not meet characteristics associated with having the same privilege as White individuals. As a shown below, AWB contributors recount times where they have been asked to speak for their entire

race, been put into challenging situations because of their skin color, and even denied the opportunity to associate with or date individuals.

> I dated my white highschool sweetheart for 3 years in secret because his parents wouldn't allow him to date a black girl #AliveWhileBlack (12:09 PM – December 4, 2014)

The language in the tweet above demonstrates meanings that are direct as well as implied about the individual. The specific language of "wouldn't allow" used in conjunction with the phrase of "in secret" denotes the denied opportunity for association. This also highlights the privilege White individuals have to arrange themselves around their own race, much like Item 1 on McIntosh's Checklist.

> Another one of my patients – "I'm surprised you don't have any kids yet. I thought your kind always got pregnant young" #AliveWhileBlack (3:40 PM – December 4, 2014)

In this narrative, the language "thought your kind always got pregnant young" implies the judgment and blanketing of Black females as promiscuous. Furthermore, the statement proposes to the individual that their opposition to align with the suggested status quo, should be commendable or a credit to the Black community.

> Realizing that I am always going to have to give 110% when others only have to give 85% #AliveWhileBlack (1:34 PM – December 5, 2014)

The narrative language in these tweets is strong and direct. Item 22 of McIntosh's checklist indicates a privilege that Black Individuals do not have according to this particular tweet "I can remain oblivious to the language and customs of persons of color

who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion" (McIntosh 1988). Clearly, this individual felt there is an unequal amount of effort needed in society depending on the color of an individual's skin.

Privilege and #CrimingWhileWhite. McIntosh's statement, "Whiteness protected me" sets the stage for examination of the tweets under the hashtag #CrimingWhileWhite (CWW). Unlike the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack (AWB), the tweets in the hashtag # CWW express a different narrative about race based experiences associated with crime. Consequently, I could not categorize the tweets in #CWW in the same way as those from #AWB. From my initial reading of each narrative, it was clear the accounts of the experiences of individuals under the #CWW were different in language used and outcomes noted. The following tweet is an example of how McIntosh's checklist was used to confirm the presence of privilege.

> Arrested for stealing street signs xmas eve back in high school. Probation waived as it would interfere with DRAMA CLUB. #CrimingWhileWhite (7:51 PM – Dec. 3, 2014)

In this tweet, the #CWW individual recounted a crime they committed. They tweet they were arrested, given probation and then the probation was waved so it would not interfere with their drama club participation. In the case of this individual's experience, breaking the law was met with a "slap on the wrist", compassion, help and opportunities to better themselves. In looking at McIntosh's definition of White Privilege and what it entails, it is clear that the individual was given special provision, a 'free pass' unlike like the narrative of the experiences of individuals in #AWB.

> I dined and dashed-cop found me at the movies, I paid the bill and he left. I was rude but not arrested and killed. #CrimingWhileWhite (2:30 PM – Dec. 3, 2014)
>
> I was pulled over doing 88 in a 45 after having 3 beers. I was breathalyzed and did not pass, but I got no ticket or dui. #CrimingWhileWhite (3:32 PM – December 3, 2014)

Through further examination of CWW tweets, similar instances of leniency were found. As shown above, users described times where they knowingly committed crimes but were not punished, and in one instance even helped by police. In one case, an individual's experience with breaking the law by "dining and dashing and rude behavior" was met with no punishment, and even resulted in the police officer paying their bill. Furthermore, the next user acknowledges speeding while under the influence of alcohol but was not given a ticket or arrested for DUI. In looking at McIntosh's definition of White Privilege and what it entails, it is clear that these individuals were given special provision, a 'free pass', and even protection as shown below.

> Pulled over for a speeding and got out of my car to hand him my tags while he was in his. I panicked but wasn't shot—he joked "I could've shot you if you were 'somebody else' who is "somebody else?" I wonder #CrimingWhileWhite (3:46 PM – Dec. 3, 2014)

As McIntosh implies throughout her research on White privilege, the color of her skin protects her and other White individuals from potential harm. In the text above, the language in the tweets demonstrates meanings that are direct as well as implied about the protection of the individual. The specific language (". . . got out of my car . . . but wasn't shot") in conjunction with (". . . I could've shot you if you were 'somebody else'") denotes the privilege of protection. Consequently, the implied belief is that the individual

was only protected because of the color of their skin. Additionally, this tweet also shows an awareness by the poster that implies they know the color of their skin (White) protected them from harm and a person with another skin color might have been harmed.

RQ 2: How is the Narrative Regarding Police-Citizen Interactions and Race Being Created, Recreated, and Extended?

Police-citizen interaction tweets. Tweets discussed in this section from #AliveWhileBlack and #CrimingWhileWhite were chosen from the initial 144 total salient tweets collected for this research. The tweets used to answer this particular research questions were from a subset of the original data that specifically involved police interactions. Moreover, the content presented in the ensuing discussion had the most interactivity (retweets and/or likes) and were the narratives that I found most thought-provoking.

Individual's identifying as White were compelled to share their experiences of privilege when dealing with police with this tweet from Jason Ross, a Tonight Show writer, tweeted the following: "OTHER WHITE PEOPLE: Tweet your stories of under punished f-ups! It's embarrassing but important! Let's get #CrimingWhileWhite trending!" Not only does this call to action support the notion that hashtags frame online conversations by asking users to recognize the existence of privilege but by also asking White users to discuss how they engage with it. As a result, the conversation is ultimately framed. In response, individuals identifying as Black were compelled by Jamilah Lemieux, a senior editor for Ebony.com, to share their own experiences with dealing with police with this Tweet, "Hey Black folk, how police have treated you for being

#AliveWhileBlack." Thus, the deluge of tweets began that urged Black and White individuals to talk about the treatment differences between the two races: positive and negative, privileged or not.

Figure 2. Example of AWB Tweet Conversation Trail.

This original tweet, Figure 2, generated 2,992 retweets and 2,010 likes giving insight into how many individuals have been exposed to this tweet. The text of the tweet

is followed by a string of comments; the blue line signifies conversations generated from the initial post about the subject matter which continues the conversation; users are able to provide their own input regarding the original tweet, as well as respond to any pursuing comments as well. Reposts and comments extend conversations about police-citizen interaction and may perpetuate ideas of about privilege or the lack of privilege associated with skin color.

The narrative language in Figure 2 indicates a privilege of being White, "I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me" (McIntosh 1988). Clearly, the #AWB individual did not receive the same level of treatment that could have resulted from the color of their skin. In this instance, the individual needed medical and legal assistance but in turn was ultimately shamed (". . . lectured on how I could ruin his life"). The comments, however, extended this particular conversation and indicated the acknowledgment of unfair treatment by explicitly stating sentiments of White Privilege (". . . Blacks are treated as foreigners . . . America is White").

Figure 3 provides another tweet example from AWB pertaining to police-citizen interactions. This tweet was retweeted 1689 times and liked 1,110. Clearly, the content of Figure 3 was popular based on the number of retweets and likes. The comments and conversation from the initial post expressed emotions of a personal/shared community experience. It is especially important to take note of the replies to the original message. Specific to this conversation the comment "we take so much for granted as White people", seems to indicate that the messages from #AWB are moving beyond just

resonating with the assumed Black population, but are getting to the assumed White people who see the perils in what is being broadcast in #AWB.

Figure 3. Example of AWB Police Interaction 2.

Additionally, these replies are also being perpetuated or carried into other tagged conversations by the addition of new hashtags (#suchalongwaytogo, #Icantbreathe) in the reply comments. While some of the replies seemed to commiserate (such as the reply "from one American human being to another, I'm so sorry, you had to experience something so hurtful, stupid & mind-blowing"), others point to the injustice (such as the reply BWB=BreathingWhileBlack . . . don't do it! Or worse . . . chocked!") Moreover, the addition of new hashtags not only extends the conversation to other topics and greater audiences but shifts the framing of the conversation from the awareness of privilege to social activism and engagement.

Review of other tweets under #AWB denoted a similar pattern. Perhaps most important, the dialogue in these tweets repeat and recreate mental images about race, police interactions and privilege through dialogue. These posts describe situations of discrimination, racial disparaging and profiling by police against Blacks in ways that indicate the behavior is an accepted and normal aspect of daily life that is perpetuated over and over the more it is retweeted. In contrast, #CrimingWhileWhite tweets evidence more pleasurable police interactions and outcomes than those of #AWB, as demonstrated in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4. Example of CWW Police-Interaction Tweet.

Figure 5. Example of CWW Police Interaction 2.

In Figure 4 the contextual language of the replies to the original tweet seems to indicate the acknowledgement of the existence of White privilege. The dialogue presented is assumed to be between a White individual and a Black individual. Although the original tweet, by a White individual was describing a situation of a more positive police interaction and outcome of a DUI, the ensuing dialogue not only supported the awareness of unfair treatment between Blacks and Whites during police interactions (". . . pointing out the disparity between how cops treat with and Black people"), but indicated the issue with such treatment (". . . it should not be the case. Everyone should be treated the same"). Interestingly enough, the replies seem to indicate a sense of agreement and camaraderie between the Black and White individuals (". . . i agree and understand, were on the same page #solidarity"). This dialogue between individuals seems to indicate the wanting of fairer treatment by officers, and the need to come together to help address this issue.

These tweets not only discuss White Privilege but also tend to imply that peril might come if they were not White in the statement "we are both still alive." These tweets and replies seem to indicate that people (probably White individuals) are aware of their White Privilege. When one commenter (presumably who was White) indicated in a reply that they did not get the same treatment as indicated in the original post, the reply "so neither of us did time and we are still alive" seems to indicate that the individuals are managing the conversation to be sure to show White Privilege when the one respondent thought they were not given privilege. Additionally, people can recount situations of others in the dialogue further perpetuating the belief in White Privilege.

Mentioned throughout this entire study, White Individuals are afforded special provisions, and held to a more upright status than persons of color. The above dialogue, reinforces this notion not only by presumed White users openly discussing how minor their punishments were for committing a crime, but by blatantly acknowledging that if it weren't for their White skin, the outcome could have been worse.

Clearly an argument can be made that retweeting the initial post and recreating similar narrative about the same topic with the same message to a population could assist with the recognition of White Privilege. Goffman's framing theory is a value tool for understanding the impact of repeated exposure to content in tweets that affect an individual's reality. Therefore, it is important to closely examine the dialogue in the content of the narratives for language that might challenge concepts even the subject matter continues to be extended.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The intent of this research was to explore how narratives perpetuate or challenge the concept of White privilege in digital communities (e.g., #AWB & #CWW) as well as how police-citizen interaction are being created, recreated and extended. A theme, an idea, and a feeling can be recreated and perpetuated in an online environment such as Twitter. The platform was designed to allow individuals freely to express their voices and find similar voices in an organized way using hashtags. The data presented addressed these questions particularly with perpetuation, creation and recreation.

Individuals are given the power to extend conversations and promote ideas and ideology if there is someone to read it, like it and retweet it. Research (Goffman 1974) extends this belief indicating that process of 'talk' (e.g., narratives) between individuals provides consistent mental representations and interpretations. In the case of these tweets, not only are the images of race in connections with police recreated and perpetuated, but the idea of privilege and fair treatment afforded to Whites as outline in McIntosh's (1988) White privilege checklist is not applicable to Blacks.

Twitter users of hashtags like #AWB and #CWW have readers, likers, and re-tweeters who maybe racially connected with similar experiences, backgrounds, and feelings about the same topics, thus building their own community within a digital environment. However, some responses may or may not be from people who are not

racially similar so we cannot make the assumption that all who are on #AWB are Black and on #CWW are White.

After analysis of #CWW and #AWB major differences between hashtags were found in how individuals used language to express themselves, and the underlying theme categories for each tweet based on Peggy McIntosh's White Privilege Checklist. Content details for #AWB focused on experiences and interactions of discrimination and racial profiling associated with an actual crime or the potential of one. Due to the frames set up by the hashtag originators, tweets were specifically posted that would potentially skew readers perceptions of the experience described. More specifically, individuals who posted on #CWW provided content that informed others about the privileges they experienced whereas, individuals who posted on #AWB typically expressed their more personal experiences with police that weren't favorable for Black individuals. Those who posted in #AWB structured their content in a way that expressed emotions and a shared community experience. Language used to convey their experiences and associated feelings provided insight into #AWB's perception of reality that differed from those who used #CWW. Moreover, the experiences recounted in #CWW had a consistent theme of criminal actions met with inaction by police.

Typically, experiences in #AWB fell into categories of racial profile/cultural stereotyping, feelings of exclusion, and societal fears. These categories did not align with having privilege or better yet, White privilege. In contrast, content details from tweets in #CWW detailed experiences about crimes and interactions with police that focused on police inactions rather than actions. These experiences were indicative of Peggy

McIntosh's personal experiences of having privilege in her daily lives because of the color of her skin.

It is important to note that messages in both hashtags were reposted and commented hundreds to thousands of times, which are thought to convey messages and meanings associated to the treatment of individuals in crime or potential crime situations. Ultimately spreading and perpetuating underlying meaning associated with skin-color inequalities/ privileges. Based on the number of times the initial posts were retweeted or commented on in #AWB, messages and the meanings behind them could have some influence on perceptions of the readers in #AWB because frames (i.e., hashtags, tweets) influence opinion and behavior by isolating and perpetuating aspects of an issue through repeated exposure to them (Cetina 2009; Rettie 2009). Thus, the meanings of messages in tweets amplifies attention to the subjects like White privilege or lack of privilege the more it is retweeted, recreated, and commented on.

My findings suggest that #CWW was not simply used as a way to brag about escape from policing, but as a way to "open others eyes" to the problem and complications of White Privilege. Similarly, #AWB was not simply used as a place to complain about negative police interactions, but to highlight the issue of racism and hopefully activate people to work for change.

Understanding the intention (e.g., challenge or perpetuate) of the narratives would be speculative without directly asking the individuals creating posts or responding. In the case of confirming whether the narratives are challenging the idea of White privilege or challenging the perpetuation of the concept cannot be validated without knowing directly

the individual's message intent. Nonetheless, my hope is that the narratives conveying language and meaning against any practice that gives one race or individual privileges based on the color of their skin while discriminating against another is wrong and needs to be stopped.

Limitations

This study was not without limitations. In qualitative research small sample size has always been controversial. In the case of this study, only 144 tweets out of 2500 reviewed met the research parameters for being salient based on the number of repost and comments. However, the intent of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or situation. As discussed previously, the creation of each of the hashtags AWB and CWW was initiated by the request of individuals who identified themselves as either Black or White. Individuals self-identifying as White or Black were urged from the originators to contribute their experiences in the appropriate hashtag. However, individuals could post or comment without verifying their race in either hashtag, making it impossible to truly know who was actually contributing in the AWB or CWW.

Conclusion

In this day and age given the rise of the social media and its communication capabilities, the way in which society interacts has changed. Although studies on social media have begun to emerge, research has only been able to examine specific elements of these sites, such as groups of users and/or type of content shared. This research contributes to these studies by offering the opportunity to provide insight into how

individuals are using new technological methods to have dialogue with one another about race and privilege; provide a better understanding as to experiences of Blacks and Whites through the social media lens. This research has also demonstrated the need for further research within and across social media platforms to be understood how individuals are having the same dialogue.

Additional areas for future work include examining the appearance of various linked hashtags. In this study, there were hashtags that appeared within the #CWW and/or #AWB discussions, which suggest that there may be more information pertaining or similar to this particular subject matter elsewhere on Twitter.

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APPENDIX A

PEGGY MCINTOSH WHITE PRIVILEGE CHECKLIST

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
7. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
9. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
10. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.
11. I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person’s voice in a group in which s/he is the only member of his/her race.
12. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser’s shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
13. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
14. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.

15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.

16. I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others' attitudes toward their race.

17. I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color.

18. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of my race.

19. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.

20. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

21. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

22. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

23. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.

24. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the "person in charge", I will be facing a person of my race.

25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.

26. I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

27. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance or feared.

28. I can be pretty sure that an argument with a colleague of another race is more likely to jeopardize her/his chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine.

29. I can be pretty sure that if I argue for the promotion of a person of another race, or a program centering on race, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting, even if my colleagues disagree with me.

30. If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.

31. I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices.

32. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.

33. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race.

34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.

35. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.

36. If my day, week or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it had racial overtones.

37. I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to talk with me and advise me about my next steps, professionally.

38. I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.

39. I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.

40. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.

41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.

42. I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.

43. If I have low credibility as a leader I can be sure that my race is not the problem.

44. I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.

45. I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race.

46. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color and have them more or less match my skin.

47. I can travel alone or with my spouse without expecting embarrassment or hostility in those who deal with us.

48. I have no difficulty finding neighborhoods where people approve of our household.

49. My children are given texts and classes which implicitly support our kind of family unit and do not turn them against my choice of domestic partnership.

50. I will feel welcomed and “normal” in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.

APPENDIX B

THE FOUR BASIC THEMES FROM PEGGY MCINTOSH'S WHITE PRIVILEGE THAT ARE USED FOR CODING

Major Themes	Subcategories of McIntosh's Checklist
Racial Profiling/Cultural Stereotypes	*Victim Blaming* 41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me. *Harassment* 5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, fairly well assured that I will not be followed or harassed by store detectives. *Financial Reliability* 13. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance that I am financially reliable. 25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race. *Housing Capability* 3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live. *Singled Out* 18. I can swear, or dress in secondhand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
Feelings of Exclusion	*Isolation/Mistrust* 27. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.

Major Themes	Subcategories of McIntosh's Checklist
Feeling of Exclusion (cont.)	2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me. *Neighborhood Interactions* 4. I can be reasonably sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me. *Job/Racial Inequities* 35. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race. 38. I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative, or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do. *Leadership Credibility* 43. If I have low credibility as a leader, I can be sure that my race is not the problem.
Societal Fears	14. I could arrange to protect our young children most of the time from people who might not like them 15. I did not have to educate our children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection. 16. I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others' attitudes toward their race. 23. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider. 32. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.

Major Themes	Subcategories of McIntosh's Checklist
Privilege	10. I can be fairly sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race. 20. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race. 21. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group. 22. I can remain oblivious to the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion. 28. I can be pretty sure that an argument with a colleague of another race is more likely to jeopardize her chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine. 30. If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have. 33. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing, or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race. 34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.